

# MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

*- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -*

**Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad**

Sunday, January 17, 2010

**Chief Vet Gets Sacked** – On January 14, Sabah Jasim Mozan, Director General of Veterinary Services at the Ministry of Agriculture, was fired amid press reports of forged veterinary certificates, ghost employees, and importing expired medicines. He is replaced by Dr. Kalthom Mossaw.

**Diyala PRT Agricultural Experts Assist With Resettlement** – The Hayat Jadida program is an interagency effort to restore war-torn orchards, vineyards, and vegetable fields. About 600 were displaced in three villages in Diyala when Al Qaida forces cleared the area but now villagers are returning. USDA Agricultural Advisors are working with the Iraqis, the UN and the U.S. Military to introduce modern production practices that boost income and promote economic activity for returnees.

**USDA Soil Physicist Conducts Field Training** - Dr. Mike Gangwer traveled to the Diyala Province PRT and, with the assistance of Jim Helm and Justin Whitmore, delivered irrigation water management training. The course was held at a Sheik's farm, with about 30 participants primarily from the Ministry of Agriculture's Extension Directorate. The objective of the course convey a basic understanding of water flow through soil, plants and the atmosphere, and then use sensors to measure evaporative loss.

**Meeting with Iraqi Grain Board** – On January 16, FAS/Baghdad met with the head of the Iraqi Grain Board and learned of several positive developments. First, Iraqi ports are handling record volumes of wheat and rice without complication. Second, over the next three months, Iraq plans to phase out expensive pre-arrival grain sampling in the United Arab Emirates (at Fujairah). Finally, the Grain Board is, on a case-by-case basis, willing to allow private use of its port facilities to offload future deliveries of corn and soybeans. The Grain Board buys about two million tons of U.S. wheat and rice annually.

**Week's Biggest Rice Sale Was to Iraq** - Export sales reported by USDA for the week ending January 7 showed the Iraqi Grain Board with the biggest single order - 100,000 metric tons of long grain rice. The Mesopotamian Minute previously reported the Grain Board's decision to buy 70,000 tons of U.S. rice from ADM. This was later increased following the failure of a Pakistani supplier to fulfill a contract.

**FY-09 Supplemental** – Progress is being made to secure Iraqi matching funds for programs paid for by Department of State supplemental funding. Senior Policy Advisor Mike Neruda received commitments from the Deputy Minister of Planning to cost-share an advanced statistics training program.

**Personnel Update** – There are currently 34 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, or embedded with U.S. military units. Agricultural Counselor Ron Verdonk is on R&R until January 27.

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